

Influencing international news: Robert G. Menzies and wartime journalists, 1939-1966¹

By Dr Caryn Coatney, University of Southern Queensland, Springfield

Abstract

Between World War II and the growing Vietnam conflict, Robert Gordon Menzies expanded the use of relatively new media to persuade more Australian journalists and public audiences to support his leadership during Asia-Pacific crises. This paper aims to help fill research gaps on Australia's longest serving prime minister by investigating Menzies' televised interviews, filmed talks and newsreel offcuts based on the concepts of the public sphere and democratic governance. Through a multi-media approach including a rare examination of secret diaries, letters and war cables, this paper conducts two case studies to assess Menzies' development of news management techniques. First, this paper identifies his news media achievements and failures during his four-month international trip in 1941. Secondly, an analysis is made of his use of the news media, particularly televised journalism, to secure more public support during his alliance with United States President John F. Kennedy from 1961 to 1963. Following from this conceptual framework, the paper shows Menzies' ability to master media technology, involve more broadcast journalists in two-way discussions and expand his direct talks with public audiences. His news management techniques contributed towards the

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growth of more contemporary media relations between political leaders and journalists in Australia. A study of these techniques is instructive for journalism students to understand the influence of the Menzies style of dominating, persuasive political tactics and to delve beyond official communications when reporting on international crises.

Introduction

From his political defeat at the height of World War II to his government's resounding election victory during the escalating Vietnam conflict in 1963, Robert Gordon Menzies transformed his media relations to secure more public support as Australia's prime minister. At the time of his resignation from the United Australia Party (UAP) leadership in 1941, he had not communicated persuasively his defence policies to Australian journalists and news audiences, concerned over the Japanese military government's rising belligerence in the Pacific (Australia and Japan, 1941, March 6; Cinesound Productions, 1941; King, 1941, May 7; Menzies, 1941). After his Liberal Party-Country Party administration won the 1949 election, he cultivated media images as a tough, self-assured "free world" ally, dedicated to Australia's prosperity, when the nation's longest serving prime minister until his resignation in 1966 (British Pathé, 1962; Self-assured Australian, 1963, January 7; P.M.'s oration ..., 1963, July 6). Menzies mastered relatively new technology to show increasingly inclusive media interviews and televised talks on his foreign policies to help resolve regional conflicts. With the advent of Australian television in 1956, he had already begun rehearsing for the first prime minister's national televised and broadcast news conferences that gave more public glimpses into the formerly private backrooms of government interviews with journalists (Coatney, 2009; Lloyd, 1988; Mr. Menzies in T.V. conference, 1955, February 8; Mr. Menzies optimistic ..., 1959, July 10; P.M. televised, 1951, January 10; Politicians to be

televised, 1950, May 23; United front ... 1965, July 14). The medium of television allowed Menzies to develop camera techniques that increased the public focus on the nation's leader, rather than the political party, and established the sense of a direct, equitable relationship between him and middle-class audiences (British Movietone News, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c, 1956, 1959; British Pathé, 1956, 1962, 1966; Cinesound Review, 1961; Movietone News, 1963; Universal International, 1956). Moreover, he used more reassuring language about "our country" to show the relevance of his leadership to protecting Australia during Asia-Pacific crises (Menzies, 1961, 1963a). His news management techniques contributed to scenes of political journalism as "the centerpiece of deliberative politics" that expanded democratic opportunities for public audiences to engage with the prime minister (Habermas, 2006, p. 423). A study of his techniques is valuable for journalism students to understand the influence of his persuasive tactics on the development of political reporting in Australia.

This paper explores concepts of the public sphere and analyses of power to gain a deeper insight into how Menzies shaped his leadership to attract more journalists' support for his Asia-Pacific policies during global crises. The public sphere has been based in networks for the wild flows of messages, as Jürgen Habermas has discussed (2006); political leaders hold a strong position in influencing and legitimising these ideas, including the news, visual scenes and images, through their mediated discussions with reporters. According to Manuel Castells (2007, 2008), these forms of communication and information are fundamental sources of power in democracies that help to construct a symbolic embodiment of a message of trust about a political leader. Through the use of relatively new televised talks, Menzies contributed to expanding Australia's public sphere by involving more media audiences in screened images of his two-way conversations with journalists; these news viewers gained more insights into foreign policy discussions that had previously taken place in secretive interviews with reporters in the prime minister's office. News broadcasters mainly cooperated

with his aims and often focused on equitable camera techniques to frame his strong messages about country and defence that created messages of trust about his Australian leadership in a crisis (British Movietone News, 1956, 1959; British Pathé, 1956, 1962, 1966; Cinesound Review, 1961; Menzies, 1948, 1949, 1961, 1963a; Movietone News, 1963; Universal International, 1956).

To assess how Menzies developed his news management techniques to influence journalists and news audiences, this paper conducts two case studies: first, his troubled media relations during his four-month international trip in 1941; secondly, his use of televised reporting to secure more public support during his alliance with US President John F. Kennedy from 1961 to 1963. This paper's literature review reveals a lack of research on Menzies' televised interviews, filmed talks and newsreel offcuts that show his growing adeptness in the relatively new media to communicate his Asia-Pacific policies to Australian audiences (British Movietone News 1956, 1959; British Pathé, 1956, 1962, 1966; Cinesound Review, 1961; Movietone News, 1963; Universal International, 1956). Yet Menzies came to view politics as an art involving journalism to provide "exposition, persuasion and inspiration" and reach his audiences' "hearts and minds" (1949). Through a multi-method approach, this paper will ascertain his ability to generate democratic messages of trust and positive news coverage about his leadership as he aimed to win the fundamental political battle over the minds of his audiences (Castells, 2007; Menzies, 1939, 1948, 1949, 1961, 1963a). The finding is made that Menzies was innovative in his mastery of the relatively new technology and inclusion of television journalists in two-way discussions for media audiences. These techniques contributed towards the growth of more contemporary relations between political leaders and journalists that helped to open democratic governance to more expansive public views.

Literature review

While authors have focused on Menzies' ability to develop radio speeches to attract voters' support, there is a lack of research on his filmed talks and televised interviews. At the beginning of his prime ministership in 1939, Menzies won press support because of his reputation for helping to improve journalists' working conditions as a constitutional lawyer some 12 years earlier (Ewing, 1999; Griffen-Foley, 2002; Lloyd, 1988). He became the first prime minister to announce the nation's involvement in war in a radio broadcast, as he declared that Australia had followed Britain to battle against Germany on 3 September 1939 (Coatney, 2011, Menzies, 1939). Despite his positive media interactions, tensions emerged in his interviews with parliamentary reporters, when he instituted a military censorship system that was as controversial with Australian journalists as the suppression of news for the British press (Griffen-Foley, 2002; Hilvert, 1984; Lysaght, 2001-2002; The National Archives, 2005). Although he had held daily press conferences, journalists resented his perceived contempt for them and their relations worsened during his trip to Asia, the Middle East, the UK and North America from January 24 to May 24, 1941 (Day, 1988; Lloyd, 1988; Martin & Hardy, 1993). Menzies' criticisms of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill were a "recurring theme" in his private diary (Martin & Hardy, 1993, p. 159). The historian, David Day (1988, p. 115), suggested that as Menzies departed Sydney, he might have been considering "the possibility of transferring his considerable talents to Westminster". He blamed the press for campaigning against him, leading to his resignation from the UAP on August 29, 1941 (Griffen-Foley, 2002). Yet few authors have examined wartime Canadian Prime Minister Dr W. L. M. King's secret diaries that provide more insights into Menzies' press and broadcast media relations during his international trip (Coatney, 2011, 2012). This paper's analysis of rarely researched private Allied correspondence, newsreels and international media coverage conveys his ability to negotiate privileged access to London-

based journalists; however, his party rivals were countering his messages to Canberra reporters, destabilising his prime ministership within the relatively parochial press of Australia's wartime public sphere ("Australia's tasks," 1941, May 26; British Movietone News, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c; Cinesound Productions, 1941; Habermas, 1989, 2006; Hartley, 2002; King, 1939-1941; Menzies, 1941; *The Times*, 1939-1941.)

Similarly, this article helps to fill gaps in the research on Menzies' use of televised news and interviews to create a symbolic embodiment of trust about his leadership in Australia's increasingly international public sphere in the early 1960s (Castells, 2007, 2008; Habermas, 2006; Potter, 2011). After Menzies resigned as the prime minister in 1941, he broadcast weekly radio talks to his target audience of "forgotten people" in Australia's middle class that helped him to regain the nation's leadership in 1949 (1942). During the 1949 campaign, Menzies' radio advertisements were portrayed as newsworthy commentaries of him as an average, hard-working family man, keen to address citizens' problems (Crawford, 2004; Griffen-Foley, 2003; Ward, 1999). Beginning his next prime ministerial term, he improved his method of communicating to journalists by giving background talks and pioneering the use of "handouts" or media statements (Lloyd, 1988). While some authors have remarked on his role as a "television performer", there is little research on offcut scenes that show his steady improvement in this relatively new style of journalistic interviews (Crawford, 2004; Lloyd, 1988; Seymour-Ure, 1989). While Kennedy's media messages helped to popularise the US government to many Australian television audiences, few authors have examined his Australian-oriented statements to increase public support for the escalating military commitments to the Vietnam War (Clark, 1998; Potter, 2011). Many Australian journalists accepted the policies on the Vietnam conflict at the time of the government's 1963 election victory; although more reporters became increasingly critical of the prolonged battles after Menzies' resignation as the prime minister in 1966 (Dennis &

Grey, 2008; Payne, 2007; Tiffen, 1978; Torney-Parlicki, 2000). Even though he helped to relegate the status of his press critics, this study's examination of his televised interviews, filmed talks and offcuts shows his ability to cultivate the relatively new type of broadcast journalists in more interactive discussions (British Movietone News 1956, 1959; British Pathé, 1956, 1962, 1966; Cinesound Review, 1961; Movietone News, 1963; Universal International, 1956).

Methodology

To understand the role of journalism in Menzies' governance, this paper examines his secret and public wartime communications to identify his development of news management techniques. His private notes and letters, as well as other Allied leaders' correspondence, reveal his increasingly successful attempts to generate messages in the press, radio and television, "couched in the specific language of the media", which projected images of political journalism as a "centerpiece of deliberative politics" (Castells, 2007, p. 214; Habermas, 2006, p. 423; Henderson, 2011; King, 1939-1941; Martin & Hardy, 1993). Longstanding Australian journalists' oral histories, largely overlooked, convey his growing ability to communicate his international goals successfully to news audiences (Alexander, 1971; Cox, 1973; Ewing, 1999; Holt, 1978; Reid, 1972-1973). In the latter years of his administration, confidential cables, secret notes and international media talks indicate his accomplishment of news media representations of his prime ministership as the embodiment of stability and security at a time of international crisis (British Pathé, 1962; Henderson, 2011; Kennedy, 1962a, 1962b; 1963a, 1963b, 1963c; Menzies, 1963b). These under-researched historical documents and archives provide more insights into the reasons for Menzies' ability to transform his 1941 journalist relations and promote his popularity during his government's 1963 election victory.

To gain a deeper understanding of Menzies as a media performer, this paper conducts a multi-method analysis of some of his key foreign policy statements and the selected news coverage of his messages. An assessment is made of the readability and keywords of five of his major statements that also provide insights into his views and use of news management techniques (1939, 1948, 1949, 1961, 1963a). For this purpose, the article uses a readability measurement, the Flesch-Kincaid score. The recommended score for most public documents is about eight, close to the reading level of “middle-brow” newspapers and suitable for an eighth-grade student (Day, 2008; Lim, 2003). Also this paper conducts a limited news analysis of the resultant press and broadcast coverage of his major statements (British Pathé, 1939-1966; British Movietone News, 1939-1963; *The Canberra Times*, 1939-1963, *The Times*, 1939-1963, *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, 1961-1963). This analysis is based on the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism formula (2008) that a news article is deemed “positive” if two-thirds of the statements appear to support a leader (Public Broadcasting Service, 2009). While the newsreel scenes were largely for cinema audiences in the 1940s, the film distributors regularly supplied these for television news by the next decade. From this selected sample, an examination is made of the camera angles, shots and signs, or meaning, based on Arthur Asa Berger’s semiotic film conventions (1982). Through this multi-method approach, this study ascertains Menzies’ skills in using visual and spoken messages to communicate his foreign policy goals to his target audiences and personify his prime ministership as engendering trust.

Findings and discussion

Whereas Menzies generated positive international media coverage about his 1941 overseas mission, he was unable to counter his political rivals’ privileged access to Canberra

parliamentary reporters (Habermas, 1989, 2006; Hartley, 2002; McNair, 2000). During the first months of his trip, he kept asserting that he was mainly advancing “Australia’s primary interest in the Pacific” to focus on his national security messages. The London *Times* repeated his phrase as he privately sought Churchill’s assurances to protect Singapore and provide more aircraft to defend Australia (Australia and the Pacific, 1941, March 4, p. 4; Mr. Menzies’ appeal, 1941, March 5, p. 3; Mr. Menzies’ mission, 1941, February 24, p. 5). A *Times* writer described his London arrival as “an event of outstanding importance”, but noted his absence from his nation “at a very critical period” because the Australian Advisory War Council announced the “seriousness” of Japan’s threat to the region (Dangers to Australia, 1941, February 7, p. 5; Mr. Menzies’ visit, 1941, February 21, p. 5). Similarly, Egyptian journalists welcomed his visit to meet the Australian troops in the Middle East and they reported he was the first commonwealth prime minister, apart from the British leader, to visit their country (Mr. Menzies in Egypt, 1941, February 7). Yet his Australian media relations were deteriorating due to his cancelled Parliament House interviews, government censorship and wartime print rationing (Alexander, 1971; Cox, 1973; Reid, 1972-1973). His political rivals, the Country Party’s Arthur Fadden and the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) John Curtin, cooperated to attract more press attention. They received favourable newspaper publicity about their joint statement to declare an aggressor was on the move in the Pacific (Explanation by Mr. Menzies, 1941, March 7; Japan mollified ... 1941, March 7; Opinion ..., 1941, March 7). By March 1941, *The Times* reported on the Australian press criticisms of Menzies’ extended overseas trip (Australia and Japan, 1941, March 6; Australia and Mr. Menzies, 1941, May 3; Colleagues ..., 1941, April 16; Harris, 1941). For example, a *Sydney Morning Herald* writer declared, “Menzies is minimising the seriousness of the Pacific threat, to the bewilderment of Australian public opinion” because he misunderstood that “people are fearful and suspicious of the Japanese threat in the near north” (Australia and Japan, 1941,

March 6, p. 3). Although he was asserting his national priorities in London, his antagonists were more easily able to influence Australian news coverage to insinuate that he was deserting Canberra in a crisis (King, 1941, February 13).

Despite his London popularity, Menzies did not succeed in dispelling rumours among some Allied leaders and the Australian media that he was preparing to leave his country permanently. During a London press conference, he asked journalists whether he should stay in Britain to become more involved in the London War Cabinet's military planning. The Australian Associated Press London-based deputy editor, Irvine Douglas, recalled the editors' "majority opinion" was that "his place was in Australia and not in Britain" (1972). Menzies, however, decided to extend his visit in April. A London *Times* writer commented, "[i]t is good news that Menzies has been persuaded to stay", but referred to his minority coalition government, adding "[t]hese local embarrassments are by no means to be disregarded" (Colleagues ..., 1941, April 16, p. 5). British parliamentarians used the media to debate the question: Churchill openly rejected Liberal National MP Edgar Granville's suggestion to invite Menzies to join the War Cabinet; and the House of Commons chief whip, Percy A. Harris, stated in a *Times* letter (1941, p. 5) that while he supported this idea, the Australian leader had "difficulties" at home (House of Commons, 1941, April 30). Allied leaders' private notes revealed the rivalry among the British Commonwealth leaders to appear as a powerful war leader. After the prime ministers met in London, Canada's Mackenzie King privately wrote in his diary, "I sensed the feeling that he [Menzies] would rather be on the War Cabinet in London than Prime Minister of Australia" (1941, May 7, p. 405). King added that New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser advised him, "it was only too clear that he [Menzies] was prepared to leave Australia for London" (1941, August 21, p. 835). While Menzies was seeking more meetings with the London War Cabinet, Mackenzie King resisted these proposals for closer military relations because of many French Canadian voters' strong

anti-conscription sentiments (King, 1939, December 15-17, 1941, May 7). Yet the rumours of Menzies' desire to leave Australia reached US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. A US diplomat, Averell W. Harriman (1941, p. 2), informed Roosevelt that Menzies' "nose was a bit out of joint in London as he wanted to be made a member of the [London] War Cabinet". By early May 1941, *The Times* was reprinting the Melbourne *Age* and *Herald* editorial demands for Menzies to return to Australia immediately (Australia and Mr. Menzies, 1941, May 3). Given his distant access to the Australian press, he lost opportunities to counter other Allied leaders' manoeuvring to exclude him from the high-level war planning (Habermas, 1989, 2006; Harris, 1941; Hartley, 2002; House of Commons, 1941, April 30; King, 1941, May 7, August 12, 23-25; McNair, 2000).

During Menzies' trip, his broadcast messages revealed his inexperience in the use of the relatively new media. Although he developed an international reputation for his stirring speeches, he aimed his broadcast talk on the 1939 war declaration at a much higher level than recommended for radio audiences because it was targeted to a twelfth-grade reading ability (Day, 2008; King, 1941, May 7; Lim, 2003; Menzies, 1939). Also he spoke five times more about Britain, "the mother country" and England than about Australia, which did not contribute to his goal of showing the war's relevance to local audiences (1939). Differing from US politicians, he was unfamiliar with the need to publicise his leadership to newsreel reporters. After he arrived in England, he privately wrote in his diary that he was "forced" to speak to a "movie-camera man" and give interviews; it was "the kind of thing I shy at very much" (cited in Martin & Hardy, 1993, p. 60). When Menzies visited Tobruk, Australian cameraman Damien Parer filmed scenes of Australian troops cheering him; however, the newsreel also showed two close-up camera shots, looking down at him asleep in a fighter plane over the harbour. The film narrator said that he was subject to criticism that was "not always just", but did not elaborate on this remark. The commentary and camera techniques

signified him as being in a weak position (Cinesound Productions, 1941). Since Menzies was an adept cameraman, he made his films and showed these to international leaders and journalists; however, these did not promote his Australian-oriented priorities. Mackenzie King confidentially described Menzies' filmed scenes as focusing on "beautiful estates, etc., in England, titled ladies with their shelters, privileged positions", which would cause many Australians "to feel he has not yet really understood the significance of this war" (1941, May 7, p. 404). Afterwards, a *Canberra Times* journalist reported on the "candid camera" pictures of him with "world-famous identities" and picturesque scenes (Mr. Menzies, 1941, September 5, p. 4). While he walked through bombed London areas and talked with factory workers, he did not relate his statement about the British "people's war" to Australians at home (A people's war, 1941, April 10, p. 9; The British character, 1941, March 26).

When Menzies returned to Australia and his flying-boat landed at Rose Bay during a storm, a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist criticised his staff's decision to block the press from entering his broadcasting room. A camera operator filmed his speech, but the journalists were forced to listen to the loudspeaker outside (Australia's tasks, 1941, May 26). After his return, he focused on negative messages about divisive political parties rather than promoting his international achievements including his positive media relations in Egypt, London, Ottawa and the US (Colleagues ..., 1941, April 16; Leaders and peoples, 1941, April 14; Mr. Menzies in Egypt, 1941, February 7; Mr. Menzies tells Americans ..., 1941, May 8; King, 1941, May 7). In a newsreel scene, he said:

I come back to Australia with just one sick feeling in my heart and that is that I must now come back to my own country and play politics. I think that it's a diabolical thing

that anybody should have to come back and play politics – however *cleanly*, however *friendly* – at a time like this (1941).

He accentuated “cleanly” and “friendly” to emphasise his preferred style of honest politics. Yet his phrase about the “sick feeling in my heart” was misinterpreted as indicating a dislike for Australia. Several days before Menzies resigned as the prime minister, Churchill “spoke very strongly” against him to Mackenzie King. By this time, Churchill knew that Menzies had been criticising him for dominating the London War Cabinet. According to King, Churchill said that Menzies “loathes his own people” because he “wants to be in England”. Churchill added, “you cannot hope to be Prime Minister of a people you don’t like” (King, 1941, August 23, p. 882). Although Menzies blamed the press for contributing to his decision to resign on August 29, 1941 (Griffen-Foley, 2002), he had neglected to use the rapidly expanding broadcast media to promote positive messages about his national leadership (Cinesound Productions, 1941; Menzies, 1941; Tebbutt, 1941).

After Menzies’ resignation, Arthur Fadden’s coalition government soon lost to the ALP during a parliamentary vote of no-confidence on October 3, 1941. Menzies had been unable to persuade Churchill to commit more military defence to Singapore; however, successive Australian prime ministers faced similar difficulties until Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 that caused the US entry to the war (Churchill, 1941; Curtin, 1942a, 1942b). Although Japan defeated Singapore on February 15, 1942, the US agreed to ALP Prime Minister John Curtin’s appeals for more military assistance. Curtin (1943) successfully promoted media messages to tell Australian audiences that the Labor government “has kept you safe” and “won security for you” while criticising the Menzies administration’s defence record (Coatney, 2011). Menzies increasingly countered these messages through his expanded use of radio that contributed to the 1949 election victory for

the Liberal Party-Country Party coalition (Menzies, 1942; Ward, 1999). The Menzies government filed the old newspaper clippings that suggested his wartime administration had failed in regional defence. Yet he seemed determined to overturn lingering doubts over his ability to govern Australia during an international crisis (Commonwealth of Australia, 1959).

The escalating Cold War provided Menzies with opportunities to improve his press relations and focus journalists' attention on his media messages about Australian stability in a divisive era. While his prime ministerial predecessors had conducted their press talks in secrecy, he initiated recordings of his interviews and some newspaper publishers reproduced these verbatim in the next day's editions (Coatney, 2009, 2011; Prime minister's press conference ..., 1952, July 11; *The Age*, 1965, March 19; United front ... 1965, July 14). He also allowed reporters to travel with him and released significant news to them to generate positive media coverage about his leadership (Menzies, December 1, 1955, June 20, 1962, cited in Henderson, 2011). A *Times* writer noted that his press conferences had become less "supercilious affairs" and he was not as likely to refer to the correspondents as "laddies" (*The Age*, 1965, March 19). Furthermore, he developed techniques to show he was a trustworthy leader and isolate his adversaries, such as occasionally enforcing press bans to prevent journalists from interviewing trade unionists in parliamentary lobbies and authorising police searches of suspected communist reporters' premises (Ban in House ..., 1951, November 8; Pressmen asked ..., 1952, February 27; Subversive elements ..., 1950, May 22). He became more adept in the political task of delivering mass messages in the specific language of the media and conveying his leadership was the "symbolic embodiment" of trustworthy ideals about national security (Castells, 2007, p. 242).

Differing from the press criticisms of his 1941 international trip, Menzies secured Australian media support for his overseas meetings on combating communism in Asia. Melbourne *Herald* correspondent Harold Cox recalled Menzies' reservations in visiting Japan

because he was unsure whether it would be a success. After Menzies postponed his visit, he travelled to Japan in 1957. Cox remembered:

I learned from two completely independent sources which I regarded as dependable that Menzies had done extremely well, that the visit had been much more successful and the feeling and general atmosphere much better than anybody had hoped that it could be, and altogether it was a very good exercise by Menzies (1973).

During the 1950s and 1960s, more news editors and media professionals moved from London to Australia; the increasingly international news staffs mainly supported Menzies' overseas trips (Commonwealth of Australia, 1962-1963; The Sydney Morning Herald, 1965, April 6).

He emphasised the relevance of his international meetings to Australians at home by focusing on the need to support Asia's anti-communist leaders and protect regional stability.

Australian and London reporters commended his initiatives to increase Asian living standards, advance the Colombo Plan for economic recovery, particularly in Japan, and contribute significantly to help resolve the Laos crisis in 1961 (Grant, 1966; Macmillan believes..., 1961, March 30; Mr. Bevin reviews ..., 1950, January 17; Spectacular start ..., 1965, June 18). He generated mainly positive news coverage of his policies on making anti-communist "friends and neighbours" in Asia by relying on "great and powerful friends", particularly the US (Big crowds ..., 1949, January 28, p. 1; Casey, 1958).

Whereas Menzies initially distrusted the spontaneity of the relatively new television interviews, he quickly developed interviews to convey his support of journalism as a "centerpiece of deliberative politics" (British Movietone News, 1956; British Pathé, 1956;

Habermas, 2006, p. 423). While some of his major public statements remained at a higher level than the recommended readability score, mainly for the eleventh-grade ability, the medium of television forced him to focus on concise visual and spoken messages (Day, 2008; Lim, 2003; Menzies, 1939; 1948; 1949; 1961; 1963a). When two British Movietone News reporters accosted him at London's Heathrow Airport in 1956, he told them: "I particularly resent this kind of thing. I'm not one of the publicity hunting creatures for television" (British Movietone News, 1956). At the time, Australian broadcasters were still experimenting with the first television transmissions (Lloyd, 1988). Even so, he removed his wristwatch and placed it on a table to indicate he would time a five-minute interview. Yet he kept focusing on his main messages to emphasise that "Southeast Asia is very important to us, very close to us". Towards the end of this offcut scene, he warmed to the conversation, saying "I want to be at Lord's to see the first ball bowled" and he predicted the Australian cricketers would perform well (British Movietone News, 1956). Soon afterwards, he preferred television interviews, seated at a table with reporters to show an egalitarian, informal atmosphere; this differed from his earlier newsreel conferences, when he appeared to tower over the journalists because he was 6ft tall and often stood on an elevated platform (Berger, 1982; British Movietone News, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c, 1959; British Pathé, 1956, 1966; Cinesound Review, 1961; Movietone News, 1963). Another offcut scene showed Menzies' Australian interview in 1963 after another trip to London; he talked with the journalists about "some excitement" in the city because of the British Secretary of State for War, John Profumo's scandal. Afterwards, he generated correspondents' laughter when he added: "One feels a little flat, but by tomorrow afternoon, no doubt, I will be, as usual, in my characteristic rude health" (Movietone News, 1963). By focusing on symbolic gestures and messages, Menzies signified to the journalists that they were confidential insiders in contentious news and they cooperated with him to portray him as a strong democratic statesman.

By the time that Menzies met US President John F. Kennedy, he had developed news media messages about his trustworthy leadership, linked to the White House administration. Yet when Menzies was visiting Harvard University to receive an honorary degree in 1960, he was unsure about the Democratic presidential candidate. In a letter to his daughter, Heather Henderson, he wrote that during a “casual meeting”, Kennedy seemed “quite personable”, but “certainly has no established record of personal achievements” (cited in Henderson, 2011). At another meeting two years later, Kennedy was keen to impress Menzies, recognising the elder statesman as an ally to help protect Southeast Asia from “subversion” (Kennedy, 1962a, p. 1). Writing to Menzies afterwards, Kennedy praised his “keen sense of the needs of Australia with a wide view of the interests of our common civilisation”. He added Menzies’ “prestige” would influence Britain to support US anti-communist policies at the next prime ministers’ meeting because “this great responsibility has fallen to the right man” (Kennedy, 1962b, p. 1). Afterwards, a media commentator said he helped to lead “world talks vital to every Australian”. When a journalist asked Menzies about Kennedy, the scene moved to a close-up, eye-level camera shot. Menzies answered, “I was greatly impressed by his lively and friendly interest in the Commonwealth and indeed his knowledge of it” (British Pathé, 1962). Through this camera technique, the broadcasters created a sense of a personal, reassuring connection between him and news audiences (Berger, 1982). Few journalists challenged him to defend his government’s support for the escalating US military effort against guerrilla forces in South Vietnam (Beale ..., 1962, May 5; Menzies “regrets” ..., 1963, July 15; Record, 1998; Suich, 2010). By establishing closer relations with mainstream newspaper journalists and elevating the broadcast reporters’ roles, Menzies was able to limit contentious questions and direct his interviews to his intended message on a strong Australian-US partnership.

The next year, Menzies and Kennedy used broadcast rhetoric to convey their leadership efforts were the “symbolic embodiment” of courage, freedom and security (Castells, 2007, p. 242). After their sirloin steak lunch at the White House on July 8, 1963, Kennedy remarked that Americans should “look west towards our friends in Australia” (1963a, 1963b). During the lunch, he scribbled notes on the back of his menu for his broadcast toast to Menzies. Kennedy hastily jotted that “relations” with Australia were “easy” because these were based on “sentiment”, “strategic interest”, “but based most on confidence with those with courage and determination” (1963c). Several days earlier on the US Independence Day, Menzies had become the first non-American to deliver the oration at the third US President Thomas Jefferson’s home in Monticello, Virginia. For his broadcast talk, he declared: “Australia has a deep feeling for your country, not just because your friendship contributes to our own national security, but basically because, great or small, we work for the same kind of free world” (1963b). International newspaper reporters praised his “simple Jeffersonian language” while portraying his Labor rivals as the “foe” who would “revise U.S. ties” and jeopardise “Australia’s relations with the free world” (Menzies and foe ..., 1963, May 1, p. A4; Menzies attacks ..., 1961, December 7, p. A4; P.M.’s oration ..., 1963, July 6, p. 6; Unna, 1963, p. A9). After Menzies received his knighthood and returned to Australia, he held a press conference to answer political journalists’ “detailed questions” including about military planning. A *Canberra Times* journalist reported his response that, “President Kennedy had not requested Australia to assume additional defence obligations” (Menzies “regrets” ..., 1963, July 15, p.1). The news report did not include adversarial information about Australia’s expanded commitments to the Vietnam conflict. Given his difficult press relations in 1941, Menzies had expanded his news media talks in Australia’s increasingly international public sphere, limiting opportunities for his political opponents to negotiate privileged access to journalists (Habermas, 2006).

Similarly, Menzies and Kennedy publicised media stories about courage, heroism and friendship to promote their military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region. The stories included Australian efforts to help rescue Kennedy when a youthful PT boat skipper during the Pacific war in 1943; as well as the nation's military searches to find New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller's missing son, Michael, in 1961; and the two countries' cooperation in space flight (1962 (Aust. "joins" ..., 1962, February 22; Baker, 1961; Chamberlain, 2002; Kennedy finds ..., 1961, March 1; Millionaire returning ..., 1961, November 24; U.S. thanks ..., 1962, March 2). Kennedy also cultivated the Australian media during a dinner on the eve of the America's Cup race in Newport, Rhode Island in September 1962. As an experienced yachtsman, he and US First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy invited Sydney-based TCN-9 chairman, Sir Frank Packer, and ABC general manager, Sir Charles Moses, to the dinner of Australian cuisine at The Breakers mansion (Glittering dinner ..., 1962, September 26). The compelling media messages contributed to Menzies' aims of showing the relevance of his leadership to his voters' "national security" (Menzies, 1963a, 1963b).

Since his coalition narrowly won the 1961 election, Menzies expanded his reliance on television that helped him to promote a friendship with the popular US president (British Pathé, 1962; Cinesound Review, 1961; Movietone News, 1963). About a month before Kennedy's assassination, Menzies called an early, "snap" House of Representatives election in October 1963. For his policy speech, he became the first Australian prime minister to rely on television to broadcast his words to the electorate. He tripled his references to defence, protection and safety, compared with his 1961 policy speech, and introduced his new keyword of "international security" (1961, 1963a). Also he used more expressions of "country" since his 1939 broadcast declaration of war and spoke to Australian audiences about "our country", which was "a refreshingly individualistic country" and "a good-natured country" (1939, 1963a). By this time, pollsters were more likely to ask voters about their

preferred leader, rather than the political party; many surveys indicated his appeal to traditional ALP voters as well as his ability to generate enthusiasm from Liberal Party-Country Party supporters (Gallup poll, 1951, March 15; Gallup poll: Mr. Menzies ..., 1954, November 30; Gaul, 1965; Majority satisfied ..., 1950, October 4). His televised 1963 speech demonstrated his attempts, since he founded the Liberal Party, to encourage “the growth of an early national feeling in Australia”, as his public relations director, Edgar Holt, recalled (1978).

After the broadcast, *The Age* correspondent, Alan Nicholls, commented on Menzies’ “friendly, intimate approach”, disingenuously reporting the prime minister had “no special training” and did not use make-up for the program; this belied his years of preparation to manage his televised interviews and speeches (Nicholls, cited in Museum of Australian Democracy, 2013). In fact, Menzies would speak from a desk in a book-lined study that was a Channel 9 set, often used for the racing commentaries called by “Clarence the Clocker” (Musgrove, 1961, p. 19). An ABC make-up artist admitted to dabbing at Menzies’ nose, but she left his “distinguished eyebrows” untouched (Tattersfield, 1962, p. 49S). Although he carefully stage-managed his televised talks to appear as authentic exchanges with news audiences, these contributed to his aims to create the sense of an “intimate” connection with Australian audiences (Berger, 1982; Castells, 2007, 2008; Museum of Australian Democracy, 2013). Moreover, Kennedy’s death on November 22, 1963 disturbed many Australian voters, who watched the televised shooting, and they decided it was “no time to rock the boat”, supporting the incumbent government (*The world*, 1963, December 1). Although the up-and-coming entrepreneur, Rupert Murdoch, and *The Daily Mirror* backed the ALP in the 1963 election, Menzies was able to marshal most other media owners’ support including major US newspapers (Menzies attacks ..., 1961, December 7; P.M.’s oration ..., 1963, July 6; Suich,

2010; *The Age*, 1965, March 19; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1965, April 6; *The world*, 1963, December 1; *Unna*, 1963).

By the time of Menzies' retirement on January 20, 1966, his relations with senior press gallery members remained discordant. The World War II correspondent, Joseph Alexander, recalled the prime minister's last televised conference in Canberra shocked him. Alexander remembered:

... Menzies strode in, frowning, to the room and took his seat without greeting those assembled or acknowledging their presence, not even by a nod, not even glancing at the chairman. Throughout the conference, Menzies' manner was abrupt and aloof to the point of rudeness (1971).

Although Alexander interpreted Menzies' gestures as discourteous, the media historian, Clem Lloyd (1988, p. 211), noted "obvious evidence of inebriation and incompetence" among some of the journalists in the televised scenes. One camera scene focused on Dame Pattie Menzies listening in the Parliament House wings and a commentator described his "simple, homely talk" to explain that 16 consecutive years as the prime minister had taken their toll (British Pathé, 1966). Writing to Heather Henderson the next year, Menzies noted: "The Australian journalist has created a legend about me, my arrogance, my unapproachability, my wicked tongue ... after a few years the legend becomes accepted history" (October 30, 1967, cited in Henderson, 2011). Although he and some long-time reporters were unable to reconcile their differing views, he instituted a more interactive style of egalitarian television interviews that provided closer public glimpses into scenes of political journalism as a part of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 2006; Hartley, 2002).

Conclusion

Throughout his prime ministership, Menzies increasingly included the relatively new type of broadcast journalists in his televised interviews and talks to show a more egalitarian, intimate form of governance to media audiences. By the 1963 election, he had expanded his use of keywords about “country”, “security”, defence, protection and safety. Although the readability of his speeches was higher than the recommended levels, he used sound bite statements, gestures, studio settings and eye-level, close-up camera shots to convey a sense of his personal connection with Australian television viewers. These tactics, couched in the specific language of the media, conveyed his symbolic embodiment of trust for voters (Castells, 2007, 2008). After his 1941 political defeat, he carefully cultivated international media images that emphasised the relevance of his foreign policies to protect Australians during regional conflicts.

Menzies never overcame his deep suspicions of press journalists that he had harboured since their criticisms of his Asia-Pacific defence record in 1941. By elevating the role of the relatively new television reporters and developing closer relations with parliamentary correspondents, he limited contentious questions and generated mainly favourable media coverage of his alliance with Kennedy in 1963. Australia’s increasingly globalised media largely cooperated with his aims to be seen as a strong, democratic leader, who shared the same aspirations as middle-class voters and was dedicated to securing their prosperity in a crisis-ridden region. By initiating the prime minister’s first national televised and broadcast news conferences, he facilitated images of political journalism as a forum of deliberative politics (Habermas, 2006). Although he had not set out to sponsor investigative journalism, he contributed to the ways and means for more reporters to involve news audiences in discussions of Australia’s governance.

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Biography

Dr Caryn Coatney is a Journalism Lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland, Springfield. She is an award-winning academic researcher and journalist, publishing extensively in leading scholarly journals and books. Caryn has a PhD (Journalism and History), MA – Research (Journalism) and BA with Double Honours (Literature and History).

Contact details

Phone: 07 3470 4609

Email: Caryn.Coatney@usq.edu.au

Fax: 07 3470 4129

Post:

c/o University of Southern Queensland

PO Box 4196

Springfield Central, Queensland 4300